

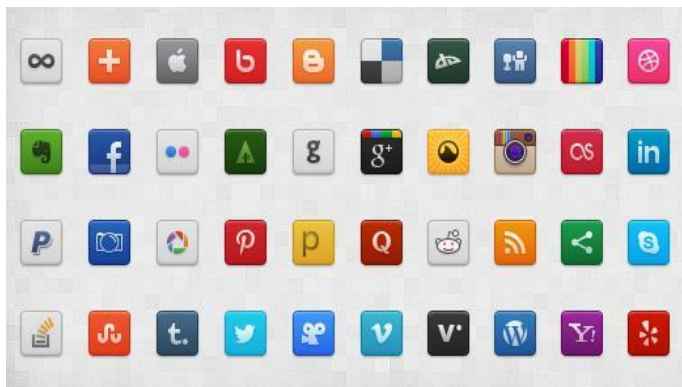
# DHS Science and Technology Directorate

## First Responders Group—Virtual Social Media Working Group (VSMWG)

### Leveraging social media to enhance public safety efforts and for community engagement

Social media and collaborative technologies have become critical components in emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. From the international response efforts after major tsunamis to hurricane and snowstorm recovery across the United States, government officials and response partners increasingly turn to social media to share information and connect with the community. Implementing these new technologies, however, requires that response agencies adopt new tools, methods, and strategies.

To address the challenges associated with the adoption of social media, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate (DHS S&T) established the Virtual Social Media Working Group (VSMWG) in 2010. The mission of the VSMWG is to provide guidance to the emergency preparedness and response community on the safe and sustainable use of social media technologies in all phases of emergencies.



Social media includes social networking sites, photo and video-sharing, blogging and microblogging, location-based check-in tools, and more.

(PHOTO CREDIT: WWW.DESIGNRFX.COM)

### Creating trust, credibility & relationships directly with the community

Drawn from a cross-section of subject matter experts from local, tribal, state, territorial, and federal practitioners, VSMWG members are establishing and collecting best practices and solutions that can be leveraged by public safety officials and responders throughout the nation's emergency response community.

VSMWG membership includes: non-profit organizations; local fire and police; local and county emergency management and public health; academia, and several federal agencies. The VSMWG hosts a monthly virtual meeting to discuss best practices, hear presentations from leaders in the social media field, and to collaborate on documents, routinely inviting other interested parties to join in the discussions.

### Social media best practices and lessons learned

The VSMWG has published four guidance documents since 2010 with input from the first responder community, group members, and partners. These documents are available at [FirstResponder.gov](http://FirstResponder.gov), and include:

***Social Media Strategy*** – provides a high-level introduction to social media, its benefits for public safety, and best practices from agencies already using social media tools;

***Next Steps: Social Media for Emergency*** – serves as a follow-up to the *Social Media Strategy* document, presenting challenges and providing next steps and best practices for public safety agencies developing and implementing social media;

***Community Engagement and Social Media Best Practices*** – shares best practices for public safety agencies and partner organizations on how to use social media to successfully engage community members and stakeholders; and

***Lessons Learned: Social Media and Hurricane Sandy*** – provides an overview on how social media was used in preparation for, in response to, and in recovery from Hurricane Sandy, and discusses best practices, examples, themes, and gaps in technology, process and policy.

Members of the VSMWG have presented at several events, including two webinars for the Federal Emergency Management Agency Emergency Management Institute, the 2012 National Volunteer Fire Council Annual Board Meeting, the 2013 International Disaster Conference and Expo, the 2012 and 2013 National Capital Region Social Media in Emergencies Summits, and the 2013 National Association of Government Communicators Annual Communications School.



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To learn more about the Virtual Social Media Working Group, or First Responders Group, please visit DHS First Responder Communities of Practice at [www.communities.firstresponder.gov](http://www.communities.firstresponder.gov)